

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
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INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ALGIERS 0182

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, AG
SUBJECT: ALGERIAN ELECTORAL "CAMPAIGN"

1. SUMMARY: DESPITE MASSIVE MEDIA ATTENTION AND MINISTERIAL PARTICIPATION, ALGERIAN NATIONAL POPULAR ASSEMBLY ELECTORAL "CAMPAIGN" DOES NOT SO FAR APPEAR MAJOR POLITICAL EVENT. REGIME'S HASTY PREPARATIONS FOR VOTING SUGGEST LACK OF GENUINE CONCERN FOR EXERCISE, AND SECRECY IN WHICH CANDIDATES HAVE BEEN SCREENED HAS LESSENED POPULAR INTEREST. PUBLICATION OF CANDIDATES' NAMES PRIOR TO FEBRUARY 4 VOTING MAY STIR INCREASED INTEREST, BUT AT MOMENT APPEARS THAT WHAT IS IN MAKING IS YET ANOTHER FACELESS SOCIALIST INSTITUTION. CONSEQUENTLY, ELECTION DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE LED ALGERIAN PUBLIC TO ABANDON ITS NORMAL PREOCCUPATION WITH MORE MUNDANE AND PERSONAL CONCERNS SUCH AS INFLATION.END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING DECEMBER 16 ANNOUNCEMENT THAT NATIONAL POPULAR ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD FEBRUARY 4, PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE GATHERED COUNCILS OF
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REVOLUTION AND MINISTERS, MASS ORGANIZATION LEADERS, MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES, AND OTHER LUMINARIES IN MEETING IN ALGIERS DECEMBER 30 TO DISCUSS PROCEDURES FOR VOTING. SINCE PRESIDENTIAL INSTRUCTION OUTLINING THESE PROCEDURES WAS DATED DECEMBER 29, DECEMBER 30 MEETING WOULD APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN PRO FORMA GATHERING. AT ANY RATE, ELECTIONS HAVE SINCE BECOME SUBJECT OF MASS OF

DUTIFUL MEDIA COVERAGE.

3. PRESIDENTIAL INSTRUCTION, A VOTING ORDINANCE AND ATTENDANT PRESS COVERAGE GIVE FOLLOWING PICTURE OF HOW ELECTION WILL WORK:

A. NUMBERS: COUNTRY'S 160 DAIRAS (DISTRICTS) WILL BE REPRESENTED BY TOTAL OF 259 DEPUTIES IN ASSEMBLY. BASIC PRINCIPLE IS THAT EACH DEPUTY TO REPRESENT 80,000 OF COUNTRY'S 16.9 MILLION POPULATION. HOWEVER, EACH DAIRA WILL HAVE ONE DEPUTY EVEN IF ITS POPULATION LESS THAN 80,000, AND IF NUMBER OF PERSONS IN GIVEN DAIRA ABOVE NEAREST MULTIPLE OF 80,000 SHOULD EXCEED 20,000, AN EXTRA DEPUTY IS ADDED (I.E., A DAIRA WITH A POPULATION OF 99,000 HAS ONE DEPUTY WHILE ONE WITH 181,000 HAS THREE). FINALLY, 8 DAIRAS GIVEN ONE EXTRA DEPUTY FOR NO ANNOUNCED REASON.

B. QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELECTION: CANDIDATE MUST BE 25 AND MAY NOT BE ENGAGED IN PRIATE BUSINESS, EITHER DIRECTLY OR THROUGH INTERMEDIARY. MAJORITY OF DEPUTIES ARE TO BE WORKERS OR FARMERS, AND "ALL SUBJECTIVITY, NEPOTISM, REGIONALISM, AND ALL FORMS OF DEVIATION DENOUNCED BY NATIONAL CHARTER" ARE TO BE AVOIDED. ACCORDING TO PRESIDENTIAL INSTRUCTION, "MOST" CANDIDATES MUST HAVE PERMANENT RESIDENCES IN CONSTITUENCY IN WHICH THEY RUNNING.

C. NOMINATION PROCEDURE: FOLLOWING POINTS IN CONFIDENTIAL

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NOMINATION PROCEDURE ESTABLISHED BY PRESIDENTIAL INSTRUCTION WORTH MENTIONING:

I. KEY SCREENING BODY SEEMS TO BE WILAYA (PROVINCE) COMMISSION, MADE UP OF GOVERNOR AND OTHER PROVINCIAL LEADERS. WORK OF WILAYA COMMISSION OVERSEEN BY A "NATIONAL LEADER." RATIO NORMALLY ONE LEADER PER WILAYA, BUT A FEW LEADERS HAVE BEEN GIVEN TWO WILAYAS TO OVERSEE. LEADERS HAVE TURNED OUT TO BE ENTIRE CABINET SAVE ONE (REGIME ECCENTRIC SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HYDRAULICS ARBAOUI), CERTAIN MASS ORGANIZATION LEADERS AND PRESIDENTIAL COUNSELORS AND ONE HIGH-RANKING ARMY OFFICER (COLONEL HADJERES, COMMANDER OF 5TH MILITARY REGION). AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED, KEY REGIME FIGURES HIGHER EDUCATION MINISTER BENYAHIA, INDUSTRY AND ENERGY MINISTER ABDESSELAM AND JUSTIC MINISTER BENHAMOUDA ASSIGNED RESPECTIVELY TO ALGIERS, ORAN AND CONSTANTINE WILAYAS. ALL THREE HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN SOCIALIST INSTITUTION BUILDING

PROCESS.

II. WILAYA COMMISSION CHARGED WITH CONTACTING GRASS ROOTS UNITS OF FLN AND MASS ORGANIZATIONS AND WITH SOLICITING CANDIDATURES. NAMES PROPOSED ARE THEN SCREENED CAREFULLY AND FINALLY PUT TO SECRET BALLOT BY A DAIRA ASSEMBLY MADE UP REPRESENTATIVE OF FLN KASMA (WARD) COUNCILS AND OF DAIRA-LEVEL COUNCILS OF MASS ORGANIZATIONS. EACH DAIRA ASSEMBLY SELECTS FOUR CANDIDATES FOR EACH SEAT, AND NAMES SENT TO ALGIERS THROUGH WILAYA COMMISSION.

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III. FINAL STEP IN NOMINATION PROCESS WILL BE REDUCTION OF NUMBER OF CANDIDATES FOR EACH SEAT FROM FOUR TO REQUISITE TWO. NATIONAL COMMISSION SITTING IN ALGIERS WILL PERFORM THIS FUNCTION. COMPOSITION OF THIS BODY NOT SPELLED OUT, BUT COUNCIL OF THE REVOLUTION, WHICH HAS NOT PARTICIPATED IN NOMINATION PROCESS, HAS BEGUN SERIES OF MEETINGS ON ELECTION AND WILL PRESUMABLY PARTICIPATE AT SOME POINT ALONG WITH MINISTERS ET AL.

4. WHERE THINGS STAND NOW: WITH TWO WEEKS TO GO UNTIL ELECTION, WILAYA COMMISSIONS SAID TO BE WRAPPING UP THEIR WORK AND ONE OF THESE BODIES HAS ALREADY SUBMITTED LIST OF ITS CANDIDATES TO ALGIERS. ALL OF CABINET EXCEPT ARBAOUI SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN IN THE WILAYA OR WILAYAS ASSIGNED THEM MORE OR LESS CONTINUOUSLY

SINCE EARLY JANUARY. FINAL SELECTION PROCESS WILL
LIKELY BEGIN SOON, SINCE CANDIDATES' NAMES AND
BIOGRAPHIES EXPECTED TO BE PUBLISHED LONG ENOUGH BEFORE
ELECTION TO GIVE POPULACE SOME OPPORTUNITY TO CONSIDER THEM.

5. ASSEMBLY'S FUTURE STATUS: OUR FEW ALGERIAN SOURCES
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DO NOT SEEM TO THINK ASSEMBLY WILL BE MAJOR POLITICAL
FORCE. ONE OFFICIAL FORMERLY ACTIVE ON POLITICAL SCENE
HERE DOUBTS THAT THERE WILL BE MANY PROMINENT PERSONS
AMONG CANDIDATES, ALTHOUGH HIGH ESTABLISHMENT FIGURE
MAY BE DESIGNATED TO RUN IN ORDER TO BE NAMED ASSEMBLY
PRESIDENT SUBSEQUENTLY. WE HAVE HEARD REPORTS THAT
SOME SECRETARIES-GENERAL OF MINISTRIES TO BE ELECTED
AND ONE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL HAS LAMENTED THAT
SEVERAL OF TOP LAYER OF MINISTRY WILL BE NOMINATED
LEAVING EVEN FEWER COMPETENT MINISTRY OFFICIALS. A
PROFESSIONAL MAN WHO IS BEING PROPOSED AS CANDIDATE
FROM ALGIERS HAS MADE IT CLEAR TO US THAT, WERE HE
FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN ASSEMBLY AND ASSUMING GREATER
RESPONSIBILITY IN HIS PROFESSION, HE WOULD OPT FOR LATTER.
FIRST SOURCE CITED BELIEVES THAT ONLY ASSEMBLY OFFICERS
AND COMMITTEE HEADS WILL BE PAID REGULAR SALARY; OTHERS
WILL SIMPLY RECEIVE ALLOWANCES FOR REPRESENTATION AND
OTHER EXPENSES.

6. COMMENT: AS FOREGOING IS INTENDED TO INDICATE,
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS DO NOT SO FAR APPEAR TO BE
MAJOR EVENT IN NATION'S POLITICAL LIFE, MEDIA
ATTENTION NOT WITHSTANDING. WHOLE ELECTORAL PROCEDURE,
FROM SKETCHY PRESIDENTIAL INSTRUCTION TO OBVIOUSLY
INACCURATE POPULATION AND DISTRICT STATISTICS,
SUGGESTS THAT REGIME ITSELF NOT HEAVILY PREOCCUPIED
WITH EXERCISE DESPITE MASSIVE MINISTERIAL
PARTICIPATION. TOTAL SECRECY IN WHICH "ANIMATED
DISCUSSIONS" OF CANDIDATES' QUALIFICATIONS HAVE TAKEN
PLACE HAS ALSO LOWERED INTEREST IN PROCEEDINGS.
FINALLY, AS PRESIDENTIAL INSTRUCTION POINTS OUT,
NATIONAL POPULAR ASSEMBLY ELECTION IS MERELY SUCCESSOR
TO THOSE OF COMMUNAL AND WILAYA BODIES; RESULT LIKELY
TO BE SIMPLY ONE MORE IN SEEMINGLY UNENDING SERIES OF
FACELESS INSTITUTIONS WITH WHICH THIS "DEMOCRATIC AND
POPULAR" REPUBLIC ENDOWED.

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7. THUS, ALTHOUGH REGIME HAS ESTABLISHED FEBRUARY 4
ECTION DAY AS SOMETHING OF BENCHMARK AFTER WHICH
NORMAL LIFE WILL RESUME, WE SUSPECT THAT ALGERIAN
PUBLIC, FROM GRASS ROOTS UP THROUGH MOST OF ELITE, NOT
HEAVILY ENGAGED. DAY TO DAY CONCERNS, NOTABLY INFLATION
AND HOUSING, SEEM MUCH MORE ON EVERYONE'S MIND.LYNE

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